

SB 185 – college student hunting licenses. (Sen. Joe Balyeat)

A higher percentage of Montanans hunt than any other state, including Alaska. However, even in Montana the percentage of hunters, and actual numbers of hunters is declining at an alarming rate. The last data I saw was about two years old, but it showed that in a 5 year period MT's hunting population had declined by more than 7%. If you extrapolate that out you'll see a dangerous trend that could reduce MT's hunting population to the point where we are a very vulnerable political minority. Thus, I've carried a number of bills to attempt to recruit more hunters, to maintain our healthy political presence. This is one more in that same line of bills.

The bill allows two types of full-time college students buy hunting licenses for the same price as resident hunters - non-residents going to college in Montana, and Montana kids going to college out-of-state who want to come back and participate in the traditional family hunt. Even in total, this will not be a lot of hunters.

Under current Montana law, non-resident college students can't obtain residency in Montana as long as they are students. There are not a lot of them who want to hunt, but why not recruit some of them to the ranks of hunters and outdoorsmen (and gals) while they're going to college here.

SB 185 will do one other thing. When the idea was circulated, one MSSA member asked about his son who had grown up hunting with family in Montana, but has had to take residence in Idaho to afford college there. "Why can't my son come back home and hunt as a resident?" the recipient asked. "Why not?" I replied.

In the Senate hearing, representatives of MSU, UM, and Carroll student bodies testified in favor of the bill, as did Commissioner Sheila Stearns.

I urge your favorable vote on SB185.